A

SERMON

PREACHED AT THE

ANNIVERSARY MEETING

OF THE

SONS OF THE CLERGY, &c.

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1163

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OF

PEMBROKESHIRE,

IN THE

PARISH CHURCH OF ST. MARY,
HAVERFORDWEST,

ON TUESDAY, JUNE 28, 1796.

BY THE REV. *JOHN JONES*,
VICAR OF ST. DOGWELL'S.

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TO

CHARLES JOHNSTONE, Eſq.

The Reverend JOHN JORDAN, M. A. Prebendary of *St. David*'s, and Rector of *Lawrenny*,

The Reverend CHARLES PIGOTT PRITCHETT, M. A. Prebendary of *St. David*'s, and Rector of *St. Petrox*,

The Rev. MOSES GRANT, M. A. Rector of *Nolton*, and Secretary to the Society.

The Reverend BENJAMIN TWYNING, Vicar of *Amroth*,

The Reverend JOHN MATTHIAS, Rector of *St. Lawrence*,

The Reverend THOMAS WOODS, Vicar of *Llawhaden*, And

Mr. SAMUEL LEVI PHILLIPS, Treaſurer to the Society,

THIS DISCOURSE

(PUBLISHED AT THEIR REQUEST)

IS RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED,

BY THEIR FAITHFUL

AND OBEDIENT SERVANT,

JOHN JONES.

A

SERMON.

PREACHED AT THE

ANNIVERSARY MEETING

OF THE

Sons of the Clergy, &c.

DEUT. XII. 19.

TAKE HEED TO THYSELF THAT THOU FORSAKE NOT THE LEVITE AS LONG AS THOU LIVEST UPON THY EARTH.

WE learn from the pages of holy Writ that though the generality of mankind ſoon fell off from their allegiance to the true God, and a great corruption and depravation of manners enſued; yet the knowledge of Him, and a mode of worſhip agreeable to his will, has been preſerved in the world in every age.

Who the perſons were that were employed in the ſacred and reſpectable office of perform-

ing the duty of the prieſt, or the miniſter of religion, in the very early ages of mankind, will always be a matter of doubtful inquiry; but we preſume, that as the ſituation itſelf was holy in its own nature, the perſons that filled it were of the moſt venerable authority; and it is the general opinion of the beſt writers on the ſubject, that the eldeſt or firſt born of each family had the honour of performing it; and in ſupport of this opinion, they adduce ſeveral paſſages as well from holy Writ as from the Jewiſh writers*.

When it pleaſed the Almighty to ſeparate the deſcendants of Jacob, or Iſrael, to be his peculiar people in order to accompliſh the all-wiſe purpoſes of his providence; then, at the time he delivered them from the Egyptian bondage with a mighty hand and ſtretched out arm, he directed the tribe or family of Levi to be dedicated to him inſtead of the firſt born of all the tribes of Iſrael, becauſe he ſaved them from the deſtroying angel when he ſmote all the firſt born of Egypt‡.

* See Shuckford's Connection, vol. i. p. 295, 296.

‡ Numbers viii. 14—18.

It then remained no longer a matter of doubt, whether the public celebration of divine worſhip ſhould be deemed a voluntary act of devotion in all men, for the Deity himſelf had ſet apart and eſtabliſhed a miniſtry for that purpoſe.

Aaron, who was himſelf of the tribe of Levi, was a high prieſt with a miniſtry peculiar to himſelf. Under him there was an order of prieſts, who were alſo of his family, who ſerved by courſe in the daily ſacrifices and devotions—of the *tabernacle* till the reign of Solomon, when the *temple* was built, where thoſe ſervices were afterwards performed; and theſe were aſſiſted by the whole tribe of the Levites.

When the nation of the Iſraelites, whom the Almighty had thus ſelected to himſelf, were ſettled in the land of the Canaanites, who were diſpoſſeſſed of it on account of their enormous ſins, a portion of inheritance was divided for them: but to thoſe who officiated in the ſervice of the tabernacle, no part of the land which had come into their poſſeſſion in conſequence of the

ſucceſs

ſucceſs of the national arms, and which is ſaid to have flowed with milk and honey, was given in poſſession. The tribe of Levi received no ſettlement on either ſide of the river Jordan, as the other tribes; but being diſtributed among them all, they were a pledge of God's perpetual reſidence among his choſen people, and they were alſo a conſtant demand on them for a grateful acknowledgement for thoſe great benefits beſtowed on them by Almighty God through the mediation of the prieſthood.

The Prieſts and their aſſiſtants the Levites were thus, by the Divine law, excluded from having any * landed property. It was their office to miniſter in holy things; and as, under the Goſpel, it is ordered that thoſe that preach it ſhould live of it, ſo under the law we find it was from their miniſtration in holy things, the Prieſthood, with their aſſiſtants, ſhould derive their ſubſiſtence

Nothing could be more ſtrong and expreſſive than the command of God by his

* Deut. xii. 12.

ſervant

ſervant Moſes to his choſen people, which I juſt now read to you, that they ſhould be always attentive to the Prieſthood. Whatever may be your future ſucceſs, whatever figure ye may hereafter make among the ſurrounding nations, ſhould proſperity be your lot, let it not make you forgetful of thoſe who offer up the ſacrifice in the congregation, who perform divine ſervice among you. "Forſake not the Levite as long as "ye live upon your earth." Keep always in remembrance, that they are the Houſhold of that great Jehovah who mightily delivered you from the bitter ſlavery ye endured in Egypt, and let them therefore experience your conſtant and moſt attentive regard.

Thus we find that, during the Moſaic diſpenſation, which was to continue till the coming of the promiſed Meſſiah, the people of Iſrael were bound by a particular injunction of the Divine Being, on pain of forfeiting his favour, to reſpect and ſupport his miniſters.

It is very evident that the orders of the Chriſtian

Chriſtian miniſtry have been appointed after the pattern of the Jewiſh Church. There was no novelty, but a continuation of the like adminiſtration with that which had all along been known and acknowledged. Jeſus Chriſt was ſent from heaven by the Father, and inveſted with the glory of the Prieſthood by an actual conſecration when the Spirit deſcended upon him. As the Father ſent him ſo did he ſend his diſciples, and gave *them* authority to ſend others; the line of ſucceſſion in the miniſtry extending from Chriſt himſelf to the end of the world.—"Lo," ſays he, "I am with you always "even unto the end of the world:"—not with thoſe very perſons, for they ſoon ſubmitted to the lot of mortality, but with their ſucceſſors, who ſhould be accounted the ſame; as a body corporate never dies till its ſucceſſion is extinct*.

* Take away this ſucceſſion, and the Clergy may as well be ordained by one perſon as another: a number of perſons of any deſcription that might be mentioned, may as well give them a divine commiſſion: but they are thereby no more prieſts of God than thoſe who pretend to make them ſo.—See the beginning of the Poſtſcript to Law's ſecond letter to Biſhop Hoadley.

Our

Our Saviour ordained twelve Apoſtles, according to the number of his people Iſrael. He afterwards ordained other ſeventy according to the number of the elders whom Moſes appointed as his aſſiſtants. Thus the matter ſtood during our Saviour's ſtay upon earth. There were thoſe three gradations; Himſelf, the Apoſtles, and the ſeventy Diſciples

When the Church in Jeruſalem was multiplied, ſeven Deacons were ordained by the laying on of the hands of the Apoſtles to preach, baptize, and miniſter in diſtributing the alms of the Church. Here we have three orders of men, each diſtinct from the other; the twelve Apoſtles, the ſeventy Diſciples, and the ſeven Deacons. The Apoſtles were ſuperior in office to the Diſciples, becauſe when * Judas fell from the apoſtleſhip, one was choſen by lot out of the Diſciples into the apoſtleſhip. The Deacons were inferior to both.

We find that in the firſt Church of the

* Acts i. 15, et ſeq.

Epheſians

Epheſians there was a Biſhop, (* Timothy was the firſt) with Elders and Deacons under him, as in the Church which began at Jeruſalem there was the order of the Apoſtles, the Diſciples and the Deacons: and it is evident that the Chriſtian Church has been governed by Biſhops, Prieſts, and Deacons from the Apoſtles downwards. Wherever therefore there are theſe orders of the miniſters of religion duly appointed, the word of God preached, and the holy Sacraments adminiſtered according to the inſtitution of Jeſus Chriſt, the bleſſed founder of the Chriſtian Church, there we find the Church continue with its form and its authority; and ſuch, my Brethren, is the mi-

* Timothy is ſaid in the ancient ſuperſcription, at the end of the ſecond Epiſtle, to have been "ordained the firſt Biſhop of the Church of the Epheſians." He is admoniſhed "to lay hands ſuddenly on no man;" therefore he had power to ordain: alſo not to "receive an accuſation againſt an elder, (or preſbyter, *Kata Preſbuteros*) but before two or three witneſſes;" therefore he had a judicial authority over that order. Directions are likewiſe given with reſpect to the Deacons of the ſame Church; therefore in the firſt Church of the Epheſians there was a Biſhop with Elders (or Preſbyters) and Deacons under him.

niſtry

niſtry which by the Divine favour, is eſtabliſhed in this Country*.

Theſe are they by whoſe miniſtry men are made Chriſtians; they to whom the care of our ſouls is committed; who have Chriſt's commission to teach mankind, to pray for them, and to bleſs them in his name; they are, as St. Paul calls them, ſtewards of the myſteries of God; by whom he inſtructs them in the truth, feeds them with the bread of life; by whom he comforts afflicted ſouls,

* They who differ from us, have withdrawn themſelves from the communion of our Church, and have no miniſtry by ſucceſſion, to make their followers eaſy on account of this defect, ſay, that the right of ordaining came down to us thro' the channel of popery.

But the anſwer to this is as obvious and eaſy as the objection is futile and ill-founded. It has been clearly proved that Biſhops, Prieſts, and Deacons were the orders of the Chriſtian miniſtry from the original inſtitution of Chriſtianity; *they* were no inventions of popery: and to ſay that the ſucceſſion of them is affected by popery, is equally abſurd, as to ſay that the Apoſtles' Creed, or the Canon of the Scriptures itſelf is affected by it: *they* came down to us thro' the channel of popery, and yet no one makes this objection to *them*, but they are conſidered as pure as they were originally: by parity of reaſon the ſame ſhould be granted, as the fact is really the ſame, with regard to the ſucceſſion of Miniſters.

abſolves

abſolves the penitent, arms them againſt the fear of death, and fits them for a bleſſed eternity.

In ſhort, the Miniſters of the Goſpel, and the ordinances to them intruſted, are the ordinary means by which God doth teach, edify, bleſs and ſave his people; to whom the true, the everlaſting covenant of peace, the covenant of an everlaſting Prieſthood is committed: a Prieſthood that muſt continue as long as this world laſts.

Having been called upon to be the advocate of my diſtreſſed Brethren, and the indigent relatives of the miniſters of Religion, I judged it right, in this age when a ſpirit of irreligion has broken forth in a neighbouring country, and produced the moſt baneful effects; and, in our own, the unity of the Church of God, which is ſaid by the Apoſtle, to be " one bread and one body," is ſadly broken by a variety of ſects and diviſions, and a diſreſpect for the word, the houſe and the miniſters of God is but too viſible; I ſay, in this predicament, I thought it would be right to remind ſome and to convince

convince others of you of the utility of the Prieſthood, and the great benefit its individuals are of to mankind; that what the Prieſts and Levites were under the Moſaic diſpenſation, the Clergy of our eſtabliſhed Church are under the Chriſtian, the real Miniſters of it, and equally entitled to your ſupport and regard.

Under the Moſaic diſpenſation God appointed a proviſion for his miniſters. Their maintenance was from *Him*; for the tithes and offerings, on which they lived, were firſt dedicated to God, and from him transferred for the ſupport of his miniſtry. "Ye have robbed *me*," ſaith he, "in tithes and offerings*. They are ſet forth as God's *own property*, being dedicated to him the firſt Proprietor of all things; they belong to *Him* before they belong to his miniſters. The wiſdom and piety of chriſtian ſtates followed the rule of the ſcripture with reſpect to the maintenance of the miniſters of religion from the earlieſt times. It ſtill obtains in this country, and I hope and truſt that whatever ſpirit of pretended reform may break out

* Malachi iii. 8.

elſewhere, with what fatal conſequences I need not mention to you, the people of *this* nation, ſo far from ſuffering themſelves to be bewildered by the deception of falſe philoſophy, will take the Holy Scriptures for their guide in this as well as every other reſpect, and long continue under the protection of the All-wiſe Author of them.

But here I muſt obſerve that the maintenance of the chriſtian miniſtry was always perſonal; that whether the harveſt to the labourers were great or ſmall, it became no inheritance; that it did not deſcend to the families of the firſt preachers, but that it was continued through ſucceſſive generations, for the maintenance of thoſe who ſhould be called to the miniſtry of the Chriſtian Church. The Lord gave his ſervants a maintenance while they were in the performance of their duty in his ſervice; but when they were gathered to their fathers, their children received no further benefit from it.

The caſe of the Clergy of the Church of England is peculiarly hard: for the tithes of many livings had, while this nation groaned under

under papal tyranny, been ſeized on by the Pope, and appropriated to the maintenance of his creatures; while the Miniſter who performed the parochial duties, was forced to take up with the ſcanty pittance they allowed him. Upon the diſſolution of the monaſteries, theſe tithes, inſtead of reverting to the parochial prieſts, whoſe right they were by all the laws of God and man, became a prey to the courtiers of our then exiſting kings; ſo that the Clergy of our Church did indeed obtain at the Reformation the liberty of increaſing their families, but were unhappily deprived of the allowance neceſſary to maintain them. I need not obſerve to you, that the Welſh Clergy have ſuffered moſt ſeverely by the livings having been thus deſpoiled; and had it not been for the wiſe and excellent proviſion of bounty of a late gracious Queen, whoſe piety towards the Clergy will be had in everlaſting remembrance, and their children's children ſhall call her bleſſed for her endeavours, by giving the firſt fruits and tenths for the augmentation of poor livings, the good ef-

fects of which are now very ſenſibly felt; ſuch has been the very great advance in the prices of all the neceſſaries of life, that many of our churches could, at this time, hardly have been ſerved at all.

Hence proceeds the neceſſitous ſituation of the families of many of the Clergy; and from the impreſſion made on the minds of pious and charitable men, by the frequency of examples of this kind, proceeded the benevolent Inſtitution of the Sons of the Clergy, which has been long eſtabliſhed in the Metropolis, to the great comfort and relief of many a diſtreſſed widow and orphan, who otherwiſe would have been reduced to the very loweſt ſituation in which poverty could have placed a human being, in this well-regulated country. Thoſe in this remote part of the kingdom partake of its refreſhing benefit, but on account of the very great number of applicants, it cannot be diſtributed to each individual but with a ſcanty hand.

To relieve the ſtill remaining diſtreſs, the Inſtitution of the Charity we are now aſſembled to ſupport, was firſt ſet on foot in this country under the auſpices of a venerable Prelate, then our Dioceſan, and who ſtill continues reſpectably to fill his elevated ſituation in the Church of Chriſt, is continued under the foſtering countenance of his ſucceſſors, and particularly of our preſent worthy Biſhop, who has given an unequivocal proof of his approbation of it by his very liberal ſubſcription towards it; and it has been hitherto kindly cheriſhed by the donations of the Laity as well as of the Clergy of this County.

So many excellent diſcourſes have been already delivered from this pulpit by men of ſuperior abilities on the ſubject I am upon, that little more needs be done by me than to recall to your recollection what has been preſſed on your minds by ſome one or other of them; and though I ſhould have felt myſelf reproved by my own mind,

ſhould I have declined coming forward, when called upon to do a duty attached to my profeſſion as a Clergyman, as this moſt undoubtedly is; yet I ſhould not have taken upon me an office to which I feel myſelf very unequal, but that I am perſuaded that all are now ſo fully ſatisfied of the utility of this charity, that an advocate of abilities much inferior to thoſe of thoſe learned Clergymen, who cheriſhed it in its infancy, and by the bleſſing of the Almighty, have brought it to that pitch of ſtability to which I flatter myſelf it is now arrived, may anſwer the purpoſe.

Our bleſſed Redeemer is no longer upon earth in perſon to receive good at the hands of men, as once in the land of Judea when hungry and thirſty with long faſting, and well nigh exhauſted with his labours for the ſalvation of the world, he vouchſafed to eat bread at the tables of ſinners, and aſked water to drink of the woman of Samaria. But, ſays good King David, " is there yet any left of the houſe of Saul, that I may ſhew

ſhew him kindneſs for Jonathan's ſake?" Are there none left of the houſe of God, that we may ſhew them kindneſs for Jeſus' ſake? Altho' Chriſt be in heaven, hath he no connections on earth, no poor relations left behind in the world? All the kind expressions relative to the ſons and daughters of affliction, who are ſtiled friends and relations, nay *members* of the body of our Lord, are more emphatically applicable to the objects of your preſent attention, his indigent Miniſters, and the neceſſitous Widows and Orphan of his Miniſters. By offices of love and charity performed to *your* brethren, and the brethren of your Lord, ye do ſhew forth a remembrance of *Him*, "who, tho' he was rich, yet for your ſakes, became poor, that ye, thro' his poverty, might be rich." What he ſaid in the character of the good Samaritan to the hoſt in whoſe hands he left the wounded traveller, he ſaith now unto you, "Take care of him, and whatſoever ye ſpend, when I come again I will repay you." For he that hath pity on theſe poor, lendeth unto the Lord, and look what he layeth out it ſhall certainly be paid him again.

And, my brethren of the Laity, give me leave to remind you, that the huſbands and fathers of thoſe for whom your charity is ſolicited, were your brethren according to the fleſh. The Clergy are no otherwiſe diſtinguiſhed from the Laity, than as they are taken out of them to be placed in a nearer relation, by their office, to the common Saviour of all. A circumſtance which, inſtead of enſtranging, cannot but infinitely endear them to all thoſe who love the Lord Jeſus Chriſt with ſincerity

Permit me likewiſe to obſerve, that if there ever exiſted a period when reſpect for the order of the Prieſthood was more than uſually neceſſary, the preſent moment calls for that attention. At and ſince the time our Church withdrew itſelf from the Communion of the Church of Rome, on account of its great and manifeſt corruptions, the Miniſters of Religion, manifeſted their uſefulneſs by maintaining the truth againſt the falſe opinions which had crept into the Church in thoſe times, and defended the principles of the bulwark of their faith—the Reformation. The days in which we live have given

given them an additional charge. In addition to the various ſects which exiſt among ourſelves, each of which, unhappily deſtroying, as much as in it lies, that unity which ought to be among Chriſtians; there is an enemy gone forth from a neighbouring country, to which thoſe diviſions muſt undoubtedly give a great advantage; deſtroying all except a political Religion, lifting up a banner of univerſal infidelity, in direct oppoſition to the chriſtian name. To this adverſary every weapon is to be oppoſed which the doctrines of Chriſt can ſupply, or the fortitude of his ſervants can bear. Succeſs to their endeavours will in a great meaſure depend upon the regard or contempt in which their office will be held. Thoſe therefore who contribute to the relief of the perſons for whom I ſolicit benevolence, publicly manifeſt their veneration for the ſacred character, by contributing to the necessity of the leaſt among its brethren; they thereby openly avow to all mankind, that the Religion of Jeſus, as delivered by the ſaints, confirmed by thoſe who heard them, communicated to them by their lawful ſucceſſors, and by the gracious

bounty

bounty of Almighty God, eſtabliſhed in this country is the Religion they profeſs, and not the falſe philoſophy of deſigning man.

Give me leave therefore, my Brethren, to recommend to you, as a means to induce our heavenly Father to caſt a favourable eye on us, and to continue the bleſſings he vouchſafes to us, to ſhew your gratitude for the benefits received from him at the hands of his Miniſters by contributing to relieve the diſtreſſes of their impoveriſhed families. "Forſake not the Levite," forſake not your lawful Miniſters, nor their diſtreſſed relatives, "as long as ye live upon your earth." Too often is the voice heard in Ramah, lamentation and weeping and great mourning: the voice of ſome one or other of the wives of the ſons of the prophets, ſaying, "thy ſervant my huſband is dead and thou knoweſt that thy ſervant did fear the Lord, and the creditor is come to take my two ſons to be bondſmen*." The good man, worn out with ſtudy and labour for the benefit of others, is hardly gone to repoſe in the duſt, but his Widow

* 1 Kings iv. 1.

is

is driven from her home, (if, being a beneficed Clergyman, he had a Parſonage-houſe to live in;) the comfort of her life, the ſupport of herſelf and her orphans is gone; ſhe hath not wherewithal to ſatisfy them; "the tongue of the ſucking child cleaveth to the roof of his mouth for thirſt; the young children aſk for bread, and no man breaketh it unto them*." The wretched orphan implores to be preſerved alive, and to be made a uſeful member of ſociety; the deſolate widow humbly aſks for daily bread. She whoſe huſband ſo often reached out the bread of eternal life to the hungry ſoul, ſhe calls upon ſuch as are bleſſed with abundance, that they will prevent her barrel of meal from waſting, and her cruſe of oil from failing. Hear her requeſt; relieve her diſtreſs; and may the bleſſing implored for you by the objects that were ready to periſh, but relieved by your bounty, be heard at the throne of grace, and reſt upon you! Alms given through faith procure deliverance in the time of trouble: they aſcend up for a memorial before God, and bring down the benedictions of heaven

* Lam. iv. 4.

upon

upon us: they ſanctify the whole creation to us in the days of health; they comfort us (when we moſt need comfort) on the bed of * ſickneſs, and they follow us whither our eſtates and poſſessions cannot†. He who receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet §; and who giveth to theſe little ones a cup of cold water‡, becauſe they belong to Chriſt, ſhall in no wiſe loſe his reward in that day when the merciful ſhall obtain mercy;—when he who hath not turned away his face from the poor ſhall not behold the face of the Lord turned away from him: when the widow and the fatherleſs ſhall plead, and their plea ſhall be graciouſly admitted, in behalf of their kind benefactors, whoſe liberality ſaved them from want and deſtruction, before the awful tribunal of Jeſus Chriſt, who in awarding the final and everlaſting allotment of mankind, ſhall addreſs theſe gracious words to the merciful. "I was hungry and ye gave me meat, I was thirſty and ye gave me drink: I was naked and ye clothed me: for inaſmuch as ye did it unto the leaſt of theſe

* Pſalm xli. 1. † Rev. xiv. 13. § Mat. x. 41, 42.
‡ Mark ix. 41.

my

my brethren, ye did it unto *me.* Come therefore, ye bleſſed Children of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations, be ye therefore numbered with my Saints in glory everlaſting."

FINIS.